
Ignoring the “Devil” at our own peril

John E. Glass, Ph.D.
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The “Devil”

- Skinner is introduced to a colleague’s class as the “Devil.”
- The *Devil*...really?
- Why, the Devil? Because his work is so challenging to Western thought...
- Ironically, Skinner offers us a cogent and sane understanding of problematic social behavior.

What are we ignoring?

- Nuclear proliferation
- Over-consumption
- Environmental degradation

Nuclear proliferation

- US Nuclear Stockpile: 9,579 (NRDC, 2007)
- Russian Nuclear Stockpile: @ 8,400 (NRDC, 2007)
- All others combined: @ 1024 (NRDC, 2007)
- US and Russia to reduce numbers to 2,000 (each) by 2012.
- Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW): *“...designed to develop and deploy new warhead types to replace all the existing weapons in the U.S. nuclear arsenal. (UCS, 2007)”*

Over-consumption

- Obesity
- General Consumption

Obesity

- CDC:
 - *Data from two national surveys show that among adults aged 20–74 years the prevalence of obesity increased from 15.0% to 32.9% in 25 years*
 - *For children aged 2–5: 5.0% to 13.9%*
 - *For children aged 6–11: 6.5% to 18.8%*
 - *For adolescents 12–19: 5.0% to 17.4%*

General Consumption

- The U.S. Census Bureau advance estimates of U.S. retail and food services sales for April...were \$372.0 billion (USCBN, 2007).
- 1.2 million non-business bankruptcies in 2002; 570,000 in 2006 (ABI, 2007).
- Homeowner debt increased from 13.77% of disposable income in 1980 to 18.20% in 2006 (FRB, 2007).

Environmental degradation

- Recent studies confirm that man-made pollution contributes to:
 - restriction of precipitation in arid land areas (Rosenfeld, et al, 2007)
 - has a negative impact on the cardiovascular health of women (Kaufman and Miller, 2007)
 - can threaten life in its many forms (Mercury, 2006).

My ecological footprint

CATEGORY	ACRES
FOOD	3.2
MOBILITY	6.2
SHELTER	6.9
GOODS/SERVICES	11.9
TOTAL FOOTPRINT	28

IN COMPARISON, THE AVERAGE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT IN YOUR COUNTRY IS 24 ACRES PER PERSON.

WORLDWIDE, THERE EXIST 4.5 BIOLOGICALLY PRODUCTIVE ACRES PER PERSON.

IF EVERYONE LIVED LIKE YOU, WE WOULD NEED 6.3 PLANETS.



Where does he discuss this?

- Science and Human Behavior (1953)
- Beyond Freedom and Dignity (1971)
- Upon Further Reflection (1987)
 - *Why we are not acting to save the world.*
 - *What is wrong with daily life in the Western world?*

What is happening?

- First, we are all under stimuli control – both environmental and social.
- We are not free, autonomous agents.
- We, however, reinforce verbal and non-verbal behavior that references “freedom,” “happiness,” and “leisure.”
 - 2005 ATUS: most time spent personal care activities (9.43 hrs), second most time spent in leisure & sports activities (5.14 hrs)

What is happening?

- In fact, there are controlling agencies that reinforce these ideas.
- The single behavior that is most reflective of these ideas is consumption.
- much of our time is spent on either consuming itself or on other behavior that is indirectly related to it.

Consumption

- Much of what we consume, we don't need; we end up over-consuming.
- When we engage in unnecessary consumption, we are reinforced for engaging in behavior that has immediate, but fairly useless, and even harmful consequences for the species as a whole.

Why don't we recognize this?

- First, because our consumptive behavior reinforces those who maintain the contingencies that control us (the controlling agencies)
- Behavior (verbal and non-verbal) that is supportive of capitalism and supportive of the government is reinforced both verbally and non-verbally.
 - Capitalism “won” the contest with communism
 - “Our” nuclear weapons are okay; “theirs” are dangerous
- Behavior that is supportive of the controlling agencies is reinforced; counter-controlling behavior is redirected through subtle shaping and/or punishment.

Controlling Agencies

- Second, the controlling agencies have a greater ability to set and determine institutional contingencies and specifically, the stimuli that control us.
- Controlling agencies possess larger stocks of general and conditioned reinforcers than most people and have an established and highly effective reinforcement distribution system.
- Third, they use establishing operations to ensure that we continue our consumptive behavior.
- Within the economy, this is called, “marketing.”

Evidence?

search conducted 4-20-07

Title	Publisher	MRI Total
People Weekly	Time Inc.	41,537,000
Better Homes and Gardens	Meredith Corporation	37,916,000
Reader's Digest	Reader's Digest Association Inc.	36,513,000
National Geographic	National Geographic Society	31,623,000
AARP The Magazine	American Association of Retired Persons	29,989,000
Good Housekeeping	Hearst Corporation	23,892,000
TIME	Time Inc.	21,431,000
TV Guide	TV Guide Inc.	21,272,000

The ads

People Magazine Ads	
<i>Food</i>	16
<i>Medication</i>	9
<i>Entre</i>	7
<i>Cosmetics</i>	5
<i>DVD</i>	5
<i>Hair products</i>	3
<i>Lotion</i>	<u>3</u>
Total # of Ads	74
Total # of Pages	146

The advice

- *Today flawless feels weightless. **For up to 16 perfect hours.*** (cosmetic)
- *Family organizing just got easier.* (pc)
- *Take on the day your way with...instant breakfast.* (food)
- *Fruit. One of the cleverly disguised ingredient in a...crisp.* (food)
- *Your feet complete your beauty.* (lotion)
- *Give your mood a boost with new...Melt Away Stress daily moisturizer, clinically shown to reduce tension and leave skin baby soft.* (lotion)
- *Only...treats osteoporosis with just one pill a month.* (medication)
- *Get'em hot off the microwave.* (food)

Nuclear Avoidance

- Information on nuclear proliferation is determined by government and economy.
- Stimuli related to “nuclear proliferation” are set by those with the stocks of reinforcers.
- The “advice” is to “trust” our government to have our best interests in mind and to “trust” their decision-making when it comes to nuclear weapons (i.e., to not exert counter-control).
- Nuclear holocaust is aversive; other verbal behavior is more reinforcing.

“American Idol”

- A 4-24-07 Lexis-Nexis search of keywords in news media worldwide for previous 6 months:
 - KEYWORDS: nuclear proliferation
 - RECORDS RETURNED: 467
 - KEYWORDS: American Idol
 - RECORDS RETURNED: >1000

So, why do we continue to ignore?

- Controlling agencies have been too powerful in maintaining the contingencies that reinforce them and not the survival of the species (Domhoff, 2002).
- Lack of recognition of control. The notions of autonomy, freedom of choice, and the pursuit of happiness (through consumption) condition us to not attend to this.
- Americans in particular, bristle at the idea of being under the control of someone else, let alone something called, “stimuli.” This is an aversive notion.
- Many behavioral scientists object to this notion, too; many firmly believe in the autonomous agent.

What to do?

- Listen to the Devil!
- Hope for the *worst* natural consequences.
- Hope that the controlling agencies take the advice of those in the know.
- Hope that the controlling agencies recognize that current collective behavior is disastrous for them, too; i.e., they are in danger of becoming extinct.
- Continue to exert counter-control through as many distribution systems that are available.
- Identify and provide reinforcers that strengthen sane behavior and develop an alternative reinforcement distribution system that competes against the established system.

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